

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
November 9, 2006

GREEN SOLUTION REPORT

File No. 06-092
Project Manager: Mary Small

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse an amount not to exceed \$100,000 to Community Conservancy International (CCI) to complete a feasibility report identifying projects that treat urban storm water through the creation of a network of parks, open space and habitat areas in Los Angeles County.

LOCATION: Los Angeles County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Coastal Restoration

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location

Exhibit 2: Watersheds Map

Exhibit 3: Letters of Support

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31201, *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) to Community Conservancy International (CCI) to complete a feasibility study and identify pilot projects that will treat urban storm water through the creation of a network of parks and open space areas in Los Angeles County. This authorization is subject to the conditions that prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds, Community Conservancy International shall submit for review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a work plan, budget and schedule and the names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed to carry out these tasks.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with the purposes and criteria set forth in Chapter 5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31201 et seq.
 2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Guidelines and Criteria adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
 3. Community Conservancy International (CCI) is a private nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the California Public Resources Code.”
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

The proposed project would authorize \$100,000 to Community Conservancy International (CCI) to conduct a study to quantify the land area and funding needed to implement a comprehensive, urban and storm water runoff improvement program that can help meet federal and state water quality standards by effectively treating urban and storm water runoff through the creation of a network of parks, recreation, and open space areas throughout Los Angeles County. The planning area for the feasibility study will encompass all of the coastal draining watersheds of Los Angeles County, which includes eleven distinct watersheds and covers nearly 3,000 square miles. Specific pilot projects within the study area will be identified in the plan.

Nearly every water body in Los Angeles County— rivers, streams, lakes, and ocean – is in violation of the Federal Clean Water Act. Water pollution from both urban and storm water runoff is a major problem in the region, which imperils aquatic life, degrades habitat and impacts beach users. Heal the Bay, a nonprofit organization based in Southern California, rates beaches based on daily and weekly monitoring of fecal bacteria and pollution levels in the surfzone. In Heal the Bay’s 2005-2006 Annual Report Card, Los Angeles County had, by far, the state’s lowest grades or poorest water quality. According to Heal the Bay’s monitoring, the five most polluted beaches in the state were all in Los Angeles County and four beaches in North Santa Monica Bay exhibited the poorest water quality in the State. Continuing efforts by the Coastal Conservancy and many other state, regional and local agencies to improve the Los Angeles River, Ballona Creek, the San Gabriel River, Malibu Creek and other coastal drainages would be positively affected by improved water quality in these rivers and their tributaries.

The Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board is requiring local governments to meet new, strict standards (“Total Maximum Daily Loads” or TMDLs) and deadlines for cleaning up these water bodies. However, these standards do not require specific approaches to achieving the goals. Many water quality experts believe that significant portions of the pollutant load in Los Angeles County could be permanently addressed by diverting urban runoff to a network of new pervious landscapes that would restore some natural function to urban watersheds, allowing soil and plants to filter water and pollutants. If properly designed, these areas could provide the added benefit of creating significant amounts of parks, recreational areas and open space in the park-poor urbanized Los Angeles County. In some cases, these projects also provide habitat benefits. These “green” solutions to water pollution – unpaving a wide variety of currently impervious areas and using parks and green space as natural treatment areas – may be among the most effective Best Management Practices (BMPs) for addressing water quality, particularly in heavily urbanized areas like Los Angeles County where the natural function of watersheds has been so altered.

CCI will conduct the “Green Solution Study and Report,” including the analysis and planning work necessary to identify and quantify the acreage needed to help meet regional water quality improvement goals for the county. The study will focus on conversion of lands from concrete to multi-benefit projects that can provide effective water treatment while providing parks and open space. This quantification study addresses a significant data gap that has hampered the implementation of these kinds of multi-benefit, “green” solutions, and will help provide important data to assist in prioritizing funding for water quality improvement projects throughout Los Angeles County. The study will compile and integrate previously collected data and studies, will identify those priority BMPs that are feasible for specific types of water quality treatment applications, and will aid Los Angeles County and state and local agencies in implementing multi-benefit projects to meet RWQCB requirements. A final report will provide appropriate maps, charts and information in user-accessible formats.

The Grantee, CCI, is a 501(c)(3), non-profit organization based in Los Angeles that specializes in tackling complex and challenging problems created by the interaction of people and nature. CCI has a history of successfully building coalitions and bringing together technical, legal, financial and design expertise to address complex environmental and social problems. For example, CCI led the partnership of state and local organizations to develop the Baldwin Hills Park Master Plan.

Site Description: The area for the proposed project would include all of the coastal draining watersheds within Los Angeles County, see Exhibit 2.

PROJECT FINANCING:

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| Coastal Conservancy | \$100,000 |
| Santa Monica Restoration Bay Commission | \$ 60,000 |
| Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority | \$ 30,000 |
| Trust for Public Land | \$ 10,000 |
| Rivers and Mountains Conservancy | <u>\$ 50,000</u> |
| Total Project Cost | \$250,000 |

The intended source of funds for the Conservancy’s contribution to this project is the FY 03/04 appropriation from the Water Security, Clean Drinking Water Coastal Beach Protection Fund of 2002 (Proposition 50) which allocated funds to the Conservancy for “the purpose of protecting coastal watersheds, including, but not limited to,...associated planning, permitting, and administrative costs” (Water Code § 79560). The proposed project involves critical planning work that is necessary to identify specific projects and strategies that will protect and restore coastal watershed resources.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 5 of the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, Public Resource Code Sections 31201-015. Chapter 5 authorizes the Conservancy to undertake projects and award grants to public agencies for restoration projects within the coastal zone for several purposes, including the redesign of coastal areas in order to eliminate scattered ownerships, poor lot layout and land uses

incompatible with coastal resource protection. The proposed project is consistent with these purposes, since it involves development of a plan in order to eliminate land use and related conditions that inhibit effective public use and enjoyment of valued coastal resources.

The proposed project encompasses several certified Local Coastal Plans (LCP) as well as some areas without LCPs. Consistent with Section 31201, the proposed project will address non-point source pollution problems identified in several of the LCPs within Los Angeles County. The project is also consistent with the policies and objectives of the Coastal Act, specifically Section 30231 which states that “the quality of coastal waters, streams, wetlands, estuaries, and lakes appropriate to maintain optimum populations of marine organisms and for the protection of human health shall be maintained and, where feasible, restored through, among other means ... controlling runoff, preventing depletion of ground water supplies and substantial interference with surface waterflow, encouraging waste water reclamation, maintaining natural vegetation buffer areas that protect riparian habitats, and minimizing alteration of natural streams.” This project is also consistent with and furthers the goals of the California Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Program.

The purpose of the project is to promote excellence of design and exhibits innovation in sensitively integrating man-made features into the natural coastal environment, consistent with requirements found in Section 31203.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 6 Objective B**, the proposed project will complete a plan to improve water quality to benefit coastal resources.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the “Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation” section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
3. **Support of the public:** This project is supported by a number of organizations, agencies and elected officials as demonstrated by the letters of support provided in Exhibit 3.
4. **Location:** The proposed project would be located in Los Angeles County and would address storm water pollution that drains directly to the coast.

5. **Need:** Coastal Conservancy funding is needed to complete this planning study. This project is needed to assess the feasibility of multi-benefit strategies for managing storm water and urban runoff pollution problems. Although many agencies and organizations support the concept of these multi-benefit “Green Solutions”, few entities have supported the planning work needed to identify and analyze the feasibility of specific pilot projects that could be implemented in the near term.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** Every urbanized county in California with watersheds that drain to the coast suffers from serious water quality problems caused by urban and storm water runoff. This study and report will help provide a model for addressing these problems in other heavily urbanized areas, particularly in Southern California. A 2000 study completed by a team of researchers from UCLA calculated that the average daily attendance the beaches in Los Angeles County between June through August was 325,351 people per day. As discussed above, the beaches in Los Angeles County have the worst water quality of any beaches in the state. Ocean pollution is now a worldwide problem causing increasingly devastating damage to marine life and human health. Urban areas are the largest culprits of the trash, heavy metals, bacteria, pesticides and other pollutants that pour into the oceans every day. Developing permanent solutions to these problems in Los Angeles County will have an important impact on surrounding coastal waters. A 2006 study by a research team from UCLA’s Center for Health Sciences found that between 627,000 and 1,479,000 gastrointestinal illnesses occurred at beaches in Los Angeles and Orange Counties every year, causing between \$21 to \$51 million in economic losses due to health care cost.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** This plan will be used to support the Integrated Regional Water Management Plan for Los Angeles and to provide information to local jurisdictions to implement plans to achieve water quality objectives adopted by the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board. Both of these efforts are moving forward on quick timelines and this project is needed to ensure that multi-benefit approaches to urban runoff and storm water treatment are considered in the decision making process.
8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** As discussed above, the impaired water of Los Angeles County negatively impacts many things, from habitat function to human health. The purpose of this planning project is to provide data and information to local jurisdictions to encourage the use of multi-benefit solutions to urban runoff and storm water management rather than reliance on end of pipe treatment.
9. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
10. **Innovation:** Multi-benefit runoff and storm water treatment facilities have been demonstrated successfully in the Los Angeles region, yet there is still some reluctance to implement these solutions on a regional scale. This plan will address some of the fundamental data gaps to provide information about the feasibility of County-wide implementation of these strategies.
11. **Readiness:** The grantee is ready to begin work immediately and the project will be completed over the next eighteen months.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN/ STATE WATER QUALITY CONTROL PLAN:

The proposed project is consistent with the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board's Basin Plan and will help achieve the recently adopted Total Maximum Daily Loads for Los Angeles. The project is supported by the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board, see Exhibit 3.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The project is statutorily exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15262 because the project involves feasibility and planning studies for possible future actions which the Conservancy has yet to fund, approve or adopt. The project is also exempt under § 15306, of Title 14, which exempts basic data collection and resource evaluation activities. Environmental factors will be considered in the studies undertaken pursuant to this authorization. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of the action.